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BASIC PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE COUNCIL

Letter dated 5 February 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with rule 12 of the rules of procedures of the Economic and Social Council, I have the honour to request the inclusion in the agenda of the 1997 substantive session of an additional item entitled "Proclamation of the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers".

The proposal for the proclamation of the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers was endorsed by participants in a policy forum convened in Tokyo jointly by the United Nations University and the United Nations Volunteers programme. Support was also expressed at a May 1996 conference on international volunteerism in Washington, D.C., that brought together 40 national organizations that collectively send more than 18,000 volunteers to serve abroad. At the 1996 annual session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund, the Executive Board acknowledged the importance of the contribution made by the volunteers worldwide and took note in that context, of the proposal of the United Nations Volunteers to consider having the International Year of Volunteers 2001 as one of the instruments to promote volunteerism.

The range of social and economic activities in which volunteers play an important role is enormous, but it is a role that usually goes unrecognized, precisely because it is unremunerated, spontaneous, often informal and unstructured. Many areas of activity, from the cultural and the political to group survival in times of crisis, would fail or shrink without volunteer input. The Government of Japan believes the proclamation of an international year by the General Assembly would mobilize recognition and expansion of local, national and international volunteer efforts worldwide.

My Government is prepared to submit the necessary documentation, with the cooperation of the United Nations Volunteers, within the relevant time limits

and will take steps to ensure the cooperation of interested organizations and Member States of the United Nations in this initiative.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council.

Hisashi OWADA
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative to the United Nations

(Signed) Hiroyasu KOBAYASHI
Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Japan
to the United Nations,
on behalf of Ambassador Hisashi Owada